

21 February 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Comment on Joseph Buttinger, Lesson in
Hope: The Present Situation in South
Vietnam, 27 January 1955. (Council on
Foreign Relations, New York)

Mr. Buttinger's analysis of the relationship between French policy and the Communists' is essentially sound. The chief weaknesses of his account of the current situation lie in what he fails to say rather than in what he says. He gives insufficient attention to the disunity within the Vietnamese government and in South Vietnamese society generally. After only eight weeks in South Vietnam he treats the French as though they were now a negligible factor in Vietnamese politics. Various French officials at high and low levels, many of the sect leaders, and a large assortment of opportunists continue to stand in the way of Diem's realizing the sort of government necessary to deal with the Communist threat and in fact there are continuing reports that some of these elements may try to overthrow Diem by a coup. The enormous leverage which the French will continue to exert through the expeditionary corps is also slighted.

An error of Mr Buttinger's which has a less direct bearing on his central theme, but which is nevertheless important is the notion that the reactionary content of French policy in Indochina derives from the local French interests. Although these interests have in fact usually been an unconstructive influence, it is misleading to write as though the French government itself were not largely responsible for the mess in Indochina. General Ely's support of an effective anti-Communist policy in contrast with Paris' conniving at Diem's overthrow and the French government's determination to appease the Viet Minh provide a good illustration.

The paper does well to stress a fact which has been commonly overlooked since the Geneva agreement: the rapid growth in South Vietnam of real enthusiasm among the people and among government officials toward the Diem government.

His unconditional affirmative to the question "Would the people vote against Communism in free election" appears very bold in the light of reports over the past several years of

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Council on International Relations

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the Viet Minh's great popular appeal, but there have been several recent appraisals of the situation which suggest that the assumption that the population would willingly prefer the Viet Minh requires revision.

In the final analysis Mr. Buttinger's confidence in the future independence of South Vietnam is based on the thesis that the US will give that country the same sort of support it has given South Korea. His insistence on "genuinely free elections" ignores all the influences outside Indochina which affect US policy towards South Vietnam.



Acting Assistant Director
Current Intelligence

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